

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 9698

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PARM, MARR, SOV, SO

SUBJECT: SOVIET ACTIVITY IN LIBYA; MISSILE BASES IN SOMALIA

1. ROBERTO DUCCI AND ERIC DA RIN, DIRECTOR GENERAL AND VICE DIRECTOR DENERAL FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS IN MFA, HAD RECENT AIRPORT ENCOUNTER WITH PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF. ACCORDING TO DA RIN TWO INTERESTING POINTS CAME OUT OF THEIR CONVERSATION.
2. FIRST, WAS MINTOFF'S REPORT OF A CONVERSATION HE HAD WITH QADHAFI IN WHICH HE ASKED THE LATTER ABOUT SOVIET BASES IN AND ARMS SUPPLY TO LIBYA. ACCORDING TO MINTOFF, QADHAFI STRONGLY REJECTED ANY SUGGESTION THAT LIBYA WOULD PROVIDE BASES TO THE USSR. QUOTE HAVING GOTTEN RID OF THE ENGLISH AND THE AMERICANS WHY WOULD WE BE FOOLISH ENOUGH TO INVITE THE RUSSIANS IN? UNQUOTE ON ARMS, QADHAFI DID NOT GIVE SPECIFIC REPLIES TO MINTOFF'S QUESTIONS BUT GAVE MINTOFF VERY CLEAR IMPRESSION THAT PRESS REPORTS HAD GREATLY EXAGGERATED THE SIZE OF THE ARMS SUPPLY AGREEMENT.
3. ON THE SUBJECT OF THE SOVIET MISSILE BASES IN SOMALIA MINTOFF MADE CLEAR THAT HE DID NOT BELIEVE IN ITS EXISTENCE AND REGARDED USG AFFIRMATIONS AS A PROPAGANDA PLOY TO JUSTIFY GREATER EXPENDI-
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TURES IN DIEGO GARCIA. DA RIN APPARENTLY CAME AWAY FROM A RECENT

NPG CONFERENCE IN MONTEREY CONVINCED THAT THE SOVIET MISSILE BASE DOES IN FACT EXIST. HE RECALLED CONVERSATION WITH SECDEF IN WHICH ITALIAN MINDEF FORLANI PARTICIPATED. HE SAID THAT THE SECDEF HAD AGREED WITH SUGGESTION THAT THERE WOULD BE GREAT ADVANTAGE TO WIDER DIFFUSION OF CONCRETE EVIDENCE (BASICALLY PHOTOS) ON THE EXISTENCE OF THE MISSILE BASE. DA RIN SUGGESTED THAT IT WOULD BE WORTHWHILE TO SEEK TO CONVINCE MINTOFF BY MAKING AVAILABLE TO HIM SUCH EVIDENCE AS DOES EXIST. DA RIN WOULD BE WILLING TO TAKE THIS ON BUT WOULD NEED GOOD COPIES OF THE PHOTOS WHICH HE SAW AT MONTEREY, AS WELL AS SOME EXPERT COMMENTS ON THEIR INTERPRETATION. FINALLY, DA RIN ADDED THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THAT MINTOFF MAY BE PAYING A VISIT TO SOMALIA SOMETIME LATER THIS YEAR.

4. DA RIN IS BEING RE-ASSIGNED AS ITALIAN AMBASSADOR TO MALTA AND EXPECTS TO ARRIVE MALTA IN SEPTEMBER.

5. WOULD APPRECIATE COMMENTS ON QUESTIONS RAISED BY DA RIN (PARA 3 ABOVE).VOLPE

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